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Programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005

Progressive implementation of article 20 of the statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

In paragraph 49 of its resolution 58/270 of 23 December 2003, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-ninth session a proposal for the progressive implementation of article 20 of the statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees with a view to its full implementation.

The present report describes the efforts undertaken over the past two bienniums to progressively implement article 20 and recommends the continuation of a gradual increase in the contribution of the United Nations towards the management and administrative costs of the Office. It is suggested that the proposals for increases be submitted to the General Assembly for its review in the context of future proposed programme budgets.

* A/59/150.

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I. Introduction

1. In paragraph 49 of its resolution 58/270 of 23 December 2003, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to submit to it at its fifty-ninth session a proposal for the progressive implementation of article 20 of the statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) with a view to its full implementation. The present report is submitted in response to that request.

II. Background

2. In accordance with article 20 of the statute of UNHCR, unless the General Assembly decides otherwise, no expenditure, other than administrative expenditures relating to the functioning of the Office of the High Commissioner, shall be borne on the budget of the United Nations, and all other expenditures relating to the activities of the High Commissioner shall be financed by voluntary contributions. While the statute does not define what is meant by "administrative expenditures", the term, based on a definition proposed by the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions in its first report to the General Assembly at its seventh session,[1] has been interpreted to mean expenses other than operational expenses and their related management costs.

3. The Assembly, in paragraph 82 of its resolution 52/220 of 22 December 1997, requested the Secretary-General, inter alia, to review the funding of the Office of the High Commissioner from the regular budget above the current proposed level. Consultations took place between UNHCR and the United Nations Secretariat, and it was found that management and administrative posts, and their related costs, were consistent with the category that should be funded from the regular budget. At the time of the preparation of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003, the number of management and administrative posts identified by UNHCR amounted to 433, while the number of posts financed from the regular budget during the biennium 2000-2001 amounted to 220 posts, or 50.8 per cent of the posts categorized as management and administrative posts. The estimated non-post costs amounted to $28,355,400 for the management and administration category, while the regular budgetary contribution towards non-post administrative expenditure amounted to $2,326,300 only. Using the ratio of 50.8 per cent as a basis, it was proposed to increase gradually the contribution of the United Nations towards non-post administrative expenditure from $2,326,300 to $14,404,500. Taking into account the budgetary constraints of the Organization, it was considered that a limited increase could be proposed for the biennium 2002-2003, with subsequent increases to be considered in the context of the proposals for subsequent bienniums. By resolution 55/254 A of 24 December 2001, the Assembly approved the proposed increase in resources proposed for UNHCR for the biennium 2002-2003.

4. A subsequent limited increase was proposed in the context of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2004-2005. By its resolution 58/271 A of 23 December 2003, the Assembly approved an increase for the biennium 2004-2005 equal to that approved for the biennium 2002-2003.

III. Proposal

5. Over the past two bienniums, substantive progress has been made in the implementation of article 20 of the statute of UNHCR. Following the proposals of the Secretariat, the General Assembly approved two subsequent increases of approximately $2 million to the proposed programme budget of UNHCR for the bienniums 2002-2003 and 2004-2005. In both cases, the increases proposed for the Office were more or less at the same level as the average increase proposed for section VI, Human rights and humanitarian affairs, of the proposed programme budget.

6. As initially proposed in the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2002-2003, it is proposed to move to a situation where the regular budget of the United Nations would cover 50.8 per cent of the management and administrative post and non-post costs of UNHCR, through subsequent increases over the forthcoming bienniums, with a view to achieving a progressive implementation of article 20. Retaining the figures for the biennium 2000-2001 as a basis, namely. an increase in the contribution of the United Nations towards non-post administrative expenditure from $2,326,300 to $14,404,500 (an increase of $12 million), it is proposed that, in the forthcoming bienniums, the contribution of the United Nations would continue to be increased in a manner similar to that applied for the bienniums 2002-2003 and 2004-2005. This proposal would contribute to the progressive implementation of article 20.

IV. Conclusion and recommendation

7. **The General Assembly may wish to take note of the present report, with the understanding that proposals for subsequent increases in the United Nations contributions towards the management and administrative costs of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees will be submitted for its review in the context of the proposed programme budgets for future bienniums.**

Notes

[1] *Official Records of the General Assembly, Seventh Session, Supplement No. 7* (A/2157), part three.